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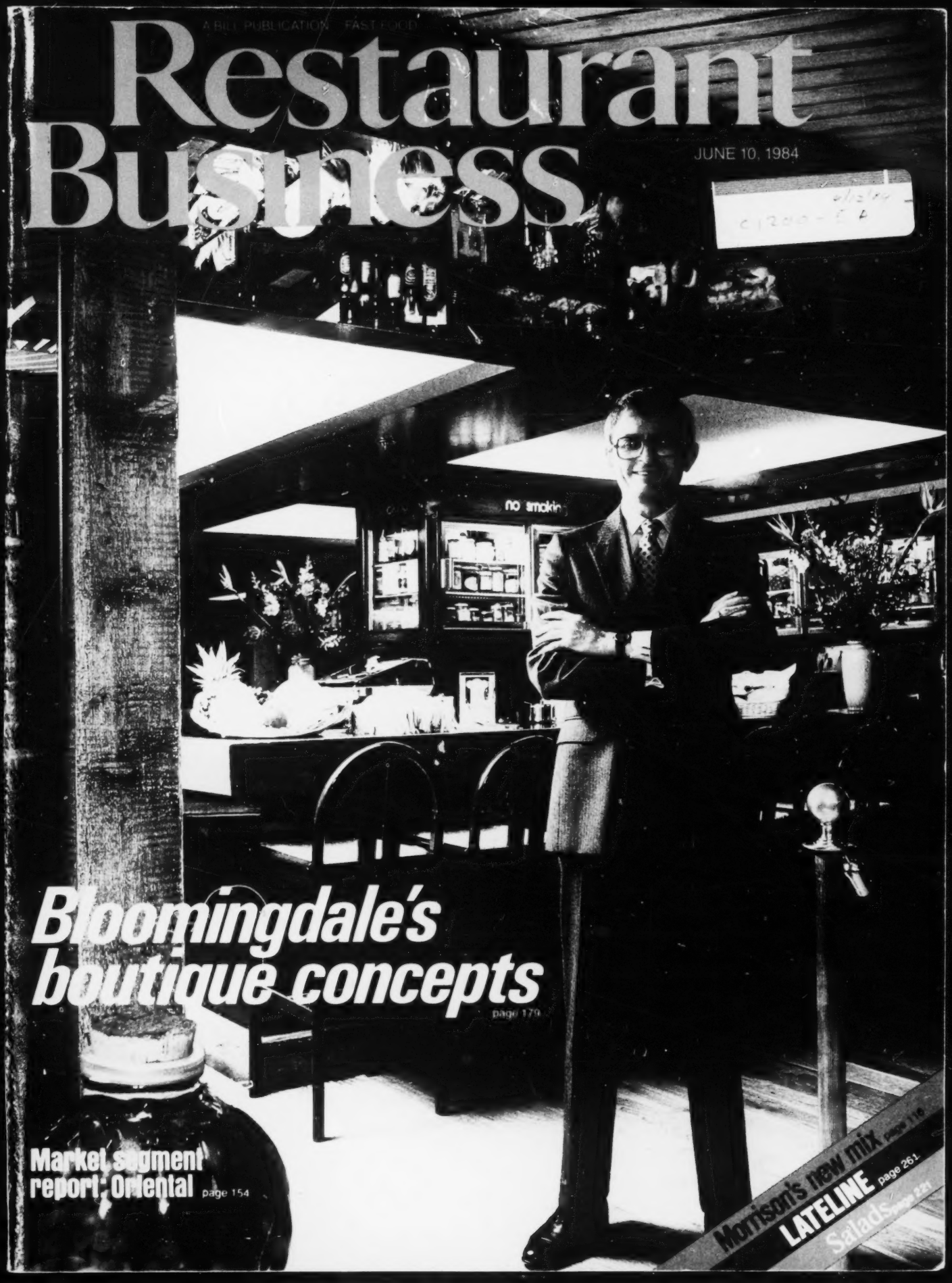
Restaurant Business

JUNE 10, 1984



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Restaurant Business

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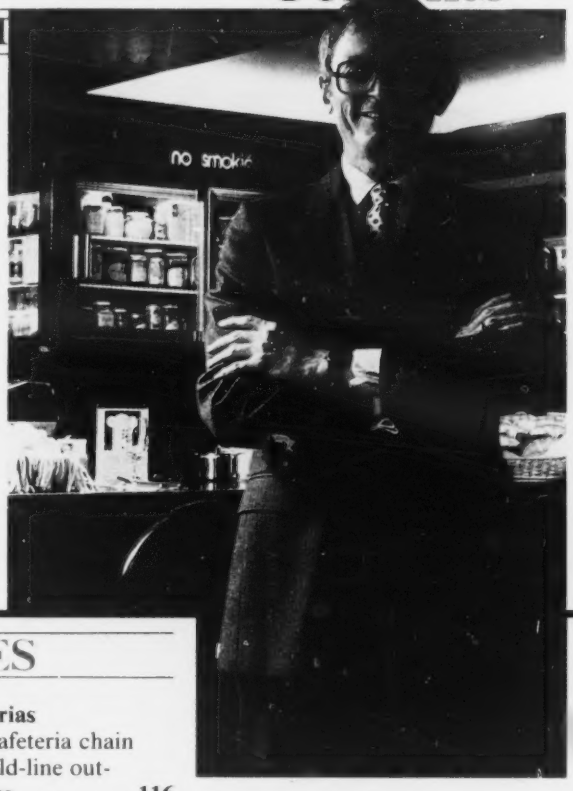

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Cover photo by Charles Wiesehahn shows Bloomingdale's Alan Reyburn at the New York store's Tasting Bar.

Top 15 television and radio advertisers

The foodservice industry ranks fourth in total expenditures of all TV advertisers and remains the top spender of all retail categories.

Restaurants and fast food chains spent a hefty 24 percent more on television advertising last year than in 1982. This increase caused the foodservice industry to jump to fourth in the ranking of total expenditures of all TV advertisers, according to the annual Broadcast Advertisers Report published by the Television Bureau of Advertising.

With total expenditures of $712 million, restaurants and fast food chains were outspent on TV ads by only three categories: food and food products, ($1.8 billion); toiletries and toilet goods ($1.2 billion), and automotive ($1.2 billion). Last year, foodservice ranked ninth.

Restaurants and fast food chains remain the top spender of all retail categories, outspending by 32 percent the at-home eating competitor food stores and supermarkets—which also increased spending over 1982 levels, to $230 million. Although food stores and supermarkets increased local spending 19 percent, the category drastically reduced its network spending—from $7.8 million in 1982 to $1.8 million in 1983.

Of restaurants and fast food chain's total 24 percent increase to $712 million, 25 percent ($213 million) was for network ads and 23 percent ($498 million) was for local ads. Local ads accounted for 70 percent of the expenditures. These figures exceed the total advertising increases for all categories of 13 percent for network; 10 percent for local.

Not surprisingly, McDonald's outspent all restaurant and fast food competitors, spending more than its three closest contenders—Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Wendy's—together, burger battle

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TOP 15 RESTAURANT & FAST FOOD CHAIN ADVERTISERS Network and Local Television 1982 vs. 1983

	1982			1983			
	Network	Local	Total	Network	Local	Total	% Change
1. McDonald's	$ 59,876	$ 92,760	$ 152,636	$ 80,931	$ 105,024	$ 185,956	+ 22
2. Burger King	35,400	28,759	64,160	35,642	46,823	82,466	+ 29
3. Kentucky Fried Chicken	27,184	14,845	42,030	30,577	19,251	49,828	+ 19
4. Wendy's	13,817	17,790	31,608	18,683	31,030	49,713	+ 57
5. Pizza Hut	13,283	22,403	35,685	17,007	30,152	47,159	+ 32
6. Red Lobster Inns	—	25,866	25,866	7,674	21,087	28,761	+ 11
7. Taco Bell	—	11,474	11,474	—	18,560	18,560	+ 62
8. Long John Silver's	—	20,159	20,159	—	17,644	17,644	− 12
9. Hardee's	—	10,795	10,795	—	17,583	17,583	+ 63
10. Denny's	12,427	4,470	16,897	12,166	4,467	16,633	− 2
11. Jack-in-the-Box	—	8,796	8,796	204	14,838	15,042	+ 71
12. Arby's Drive-In	4,802	7,398	12,200	6,270	7,652	13,923	+ 14
13. Dairy Queen	—	8,744	8,744	—	10,626	10,626	+ 22
14. Sizzler	—	8,645	8,645	—	8,846	8,846	+ 2
15. Godfather's Pizza	—	5,855	5,855	—	8,103	8,103	+ 38
Category Total*	**$ 170,104**	**$ 405,909**	**$ 576,013**	**$ 213,389**	**$ 498,133**	**$ 711,522**	**+ 24**

Source: Television Bureau of Advertising from Broadcast Advertisers Reports data.
**Total includes all restaurant and fast food advertisers.*

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increases aside. At $81 million for network ads (a 35 percent increase), McDonald's is the only restaurant or fast food chain on the list of the top 25 leading network televison advertisers. McDonald's holds the 22nd position.

Rivals Burger King and Wendy's increased spending by higher percentages than McDonald's 22 percent. Burger King spent 29 percent, or $82 million more, and Wendy's increased TV advertising an impressive 57 percent, or $50 million.

Burger King is the only one of the top four chains that increased radio advertisement spending, with a 23 percent increase to $5.1 million.

Several chains decreased radio expenditures. McDonald's is down 25 percent to $2.8 million for radio ads; Kentucky Fried Chicken is down 54 percent to $976,000; and Wendy's is down 20 percent to $900,000.

Jack In The Box stepped up spending significantly, with a 71 percent jump to $15 million in television advertising and a 43 percent increase to $6.7 million in radio advertising. Jack In The Box spent $204,000 on network ads, an impressive show since the company ran no network advertising in 1982.

Other chains that made major TV advertising jumps were Hardee's, up 63 percent to $18 million; Taco Bell, up 62 percent to $19 million; and Godfather's Pizza, up 38 percent to $8 million, all local.

Denny's is the only chain in the top 15 that cut its ad budget (by two percent), spending a total of $17 million. Meanwhile, the coffee shop chain boosted its radio ad budget by 99 percent to $656,000.

Nine out of the 15 top TV advertisers put all their money into local ads, with Kentucky Fried Chicken and Denny's the only two chains to spend more on network spots.

Nine restaurant and fast food companies held spots on the list of the top 25 local/retail television advertisers: McDonald's—1; Pillsbury (Burger King)—2; Pepsico (Pizza Hut, Taco Bell)—3; Wendy's—4; General Mills (Red Lobster Inns)—7; R.J. Reynolds Industries (Kentucky Fried Chicken)—9; Imasco (Hardees, Burger Chef)—13; Jerico (Long John Silvers)—14; and Ralston Purina (Jack in the Box)—19.

Hotels and resorts with foodservice facilities, which compete with freestanding restaurants, spent significantly less on TV ads in 1983. Locally, hotels and resorts increased their expenditures 14 percent to $42 million. On network TV, the category actually reduced its spending six percent, to $20 million. This is primarily due to strategies designed to tap into the local market and attract residents as well as guests.

Radio advertising

Bennigans reported the largest jump in radio advertising, increasing its budget by an enormous 533 percent, to $4.8 million; the chain did not make the top 15 TV list. Round Table Pizza and White Castle followed with a 295 percent jump and a 107 percent jump, respectively. Overall, radio expenditures by restaurants were up 32 percent.

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Restaurant Business

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Of a total 24 percent increase in advertising expenditures, $712 million was devoted to network ads and $498 million to local ads. Not surprisingly, McDonald's again outspent all of its competitors burger battles aside.

TOP 15 RESTAURANT RADIO ADVERTISERS

1983 Rank	1983 (000s)	1982 (000s)	% Change
1. Jack in The Box	$ 6,673	$ 4,672	+ 43
2. Burger King	5,116	4,151	+ 23
3. Bennigans	4,817	761	+533
4. Red Lobster	3,674	2,662	+ 38
5. Taco Bell	3,589	2,190	+ 64
6. McDonald's	2,858	3,856	– 25
7. Domino's Pizza	2,809	—	—
8. Hardee's	2,299	2,276	+ 1
9. Howard Johnson	2,022	1,613	+ 25
10. Krystal	1,654	1,861	– 11
11. White Castle	1,362	659	+107
12. Denny's	1,307	656	+ 99
13. Round Table Pizza	1,198	303	+295
14. Kentucky Fried Chicken	976	1,429	– 54
15. Wendy's	900	1,126	– 20
Industry Total*	65,737	49,891	+ 32

Source: Radio Advertising Bureau
**Total includes all restaurant advertisers.*

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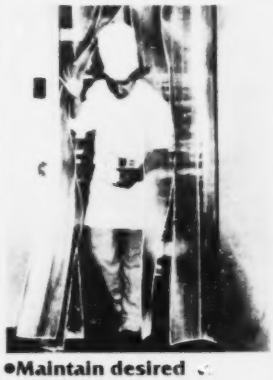

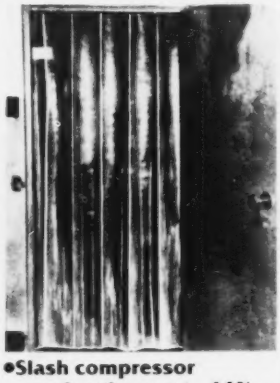

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Market Segment Report

Oriental market poised for explosive chain growth

by Jacque White Kochak

Oriental restaurants in the U.S. have not changed much for decades, but now two significant trends are transforming the image of this segment. Some analysts see restaurants serving Chinese and Japanese food poised for the same kind of explosive chain growth that has transformed the Mexican and Italian segments.

Oriental food is colorful and unusual. Oriental food is nutritious. Thus it is becoming increasingly popular among today's sophisticated, health-conscious consumers.

Recent CREST data made available to the National Restaurant Association clearly shows the activity in the segment. While restaurants in all categories posted a 2.7 percent increase in overall traffic between 1981 and 1982, traffic at quick service Oriental restaurants increased by an impressive 8.6 percent. Traffic at upscale Oriental restaurants was also up a healthy 10.9 percent, according to CREST. Surprisingly, traffic at mid-scale Oriental restaurants—the kind most likely to be run by mom-and-pop Chinese operators—was down 2.2 percent.

On the low-priced end of the segment, savvy Westerners with an eye for profit are beginning to see potential in exotic Far Eastern cuisine. Several infant chains are planning expansion. And a couple of Japanese companies are even stepping up U.S. openings.

On the upper end, Oriental food—particularly the kind of Japanese/French cuisine dubbed "La Nouvelle Cuisine Franco-Japonaise" and epitomized by Los Angeles' La Petite Chaya, has become very fashionable on both coasts. At the same time, knowledgeable consumers are seeking out some lesser known, authentic Oriental cuisines—though they still seem to love the kind of Americanized Oriental represented by expanding Benihana of Tokyo.

The drop in mid-segment pinpointed by CREST data could have ominous implications for the more traditional kind of Oriental restaurant. "Most people still expect to see Oriental faces when they go out for dinner, but at least 75 percent of Oriental restaurants are quick and carry-out oriented," says Norm Dyer, who with his Chinese wife and her parents operates Phoenix Oriental Cuisine in a Chicago suburb. "The low-end Oriental restaurants run by

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On the growth path is San Antonio-based Quik Wok with eight units generating annual sales of $2.9 million in 1983.

Quik Wok offers a limited selection of Cantonese dishes averaging $4.76.

Oriental families may have a run for their money. Wendy's could serve a good egg roll if they wanted to."

Promotion-minded individuals have started seeing potential in Oriental food because it has proven popular with people ranging from farmers to big city executives, yet the Oriental food segment has kept a very low profile. Despite the fact that there are more Oriental restaurants (11,369) in the U.S. than chicken restaurants (10,182), and as many Oriental restaurants as there are Mexican restaurants (11,352), Oriental restaurants have rarely been promoted or marketed aggressively.

There are very few major Oriental chains in the U.S. Oriental restaurants rarely franchise their concepts. And advertising for Oriental restaurants is minimal.

Yet Oriental restaurants account for 3.9 percent of all restaurants nationwide, compared to chicken restaurants at 3.5 percent and Mexican restaurants at 3.8 percent, according to Restaurant Consulting Group's Spring 1983 RE-COUNT study.

The reason for this lack of marketing seems to be rooted in the fact that Oriental restaurants have been dominated by Oriental families.

Chinese fast food

"Mom, pop, and family made a good living and they were satisfied with one or two units," says Joel Golden, one of the founders of Minneapolis-based Nankin Express. "Perhaps, they were not so entrepre-

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ORIENTAL GROWTH CONCEPTS

Name	Type of Service	1983 Sales	No. of Units	Avg. Unit Volume	Growth Outlook
Benihana of Tokyo	Full service	$70 million	47	$1.5 million	Will open 2-3 units a year
Gasho of Japan	Full service	$5.6 million	4	$1.4 million	One unit under construction at cost of $2.9 million. Eyeing 35 additional markets
Dosanko	Fast food	$8 million	15	$600,000	Three additional units under development in New York City. Plans to have 50 units in three years, all in East Coast cities
Tokyo Bowl	Fast food	$2.4 million	14	$285,000	Will open 3-4 company units this year. No franchising plans yet. Just went public
Quik Wok	Fast food	$2.9 million	8	$500,000	Ninth store under construction, just signed a Florida lease. Preparing franchising program for national expansion
Nankin Express	Fast food	$590,000	2	$400,000	Just signed development agreement with giant International Multifoods, developer of Mr. Donut. Just went public

neurial that they wanted to grow. The recipes can be very sophisticated and complex, and without a lot of refining and modernizing of recipes they couldn't expand."

Nankin Express, recently turned public, developed out of a popular Twin Cities full-service restaurant, The Nankin. Golden, one of The Nankin's owners, decided to take the restaurant's most popular selections and offer them in a fast food format. The Nankin Express serves chicken, sub gum, and chop suey chow mein; chop suey; sweet and sour pork, chicken, and shrimp; pork fried rice or chicken fried rice; egg foo yung; chicken wings; and stir-fried vegetables with beef.

Prices range from 99 cents for an egg roll to $3.95 for pepper steak.

"It's your basic McDonald's type of menu," says Golden. "The customer comes in, views the menu board, and places an order. A drive-through window accounts for about 30 percent of business."

Two Nankin Expresses are now operating in the Twin Cities area, with three more to open by September of '84. Golden projects that at least three more will open soon afterwards. He is looking in Southern California for sites to establish two company stores and then fill out the market with franchised units.

In 1983, one unit and another that

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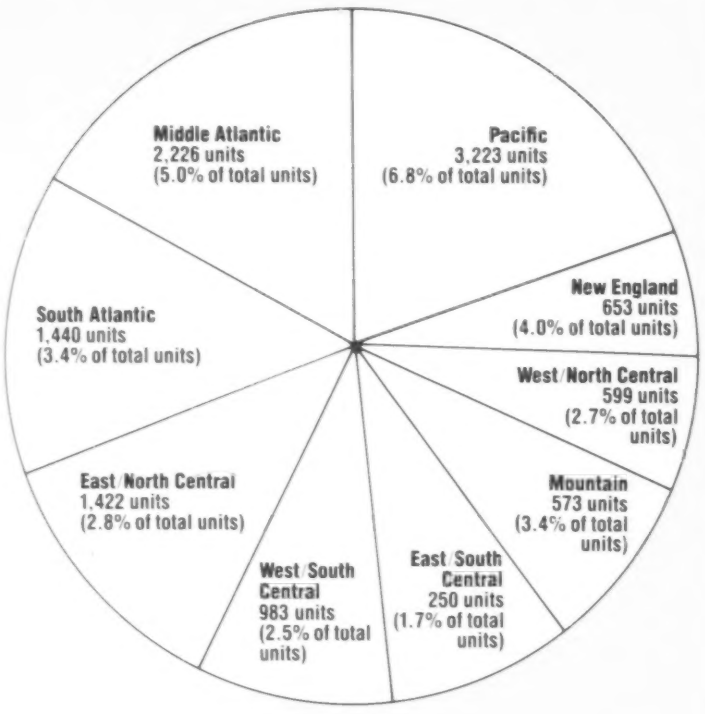
U.S. Oriental Franchising



11,369 total U.S. units
(3.9% of total U.S. restaurants)
Source: Restaurant Consulting Group
RE-COUNT, Spring 1983

The chef is the star at Benihana's 47 Japanese steak houses nationwide.

opened during the year posted sales of $590,000, with average unit volume approaching $400,000.

Nankin Express has worked with food scientists and food consultants analyzing traditional recipes and substituting ingredients that are easily available in the U.S., as well as developing a training program. The traditional wok is the key piece of equipment in a Nankin kitchen.

The fledgeling chain recently received a big boost when giant International Multifoods, operator of the 950-unit Mr. Donut chain, signed a franchising agreement that gives International Multifoods development rights for the eastern U.S. and Japan. International Multifoods has announced plans to open six units in the Chicago area in 1984. The company has already opened one unit in a food court, but future units will probably be freestanding.

"We saw great opportunity and growth potential for the Nankin Express concept," says Ken Kuhn, division vice president for development at International Multifoods. "Oriental food is healthy food, and with the fast food consumer becoming increasingly conscientious about what he eats, we believe Nankin Express will be an alternative."

Quik Wok, another Chinese fast food chain, operates eight units in San Antonio with another under construction and several Florida leases signed. President Connie Andrews is presently implementing a national franchising plan.

"The whole world is our oyster right now," she says. "We want to be the McDonald's of Oriental food, and that's why we're going into high gear. I have no doubt that others will be doing the same thing I'm doing, and some of them will probably be successful."

Andrews has owned a full-service Chinese restaurant for 12 years, and Quik Wok opened in 1980 in a renovated fried chicken store to handle overflow carry-out sales.

The primarily Cantonese menu includes sweet and sour pork, fried rice, pepper steak, egg rolls, beef chop suey, almond chicken, and lemon chicken, with average check running $4.76. Prices range from 85 cents for an egg roll to $3.75 for pepper steak.

Andrews says her first unit grossed $360,000 the first year, despite the fact that she didn't know what she was doing. She realized she was tapping an entirely new market, and now units average $500,000 a year. The Quik Wok units grossed $2.9 million in 1983.

Andrews agrees with Golden that fast food Chinese restaurants have been rare because everybody perceives Chinese food to be very complicated.

She explains that over many years she has developed standardized recipes and procedures that make it possible for an untrained 17-year-old to step into the kitchen and use the traditional wok to prepare nearly everything.

"People see 'Chinese fast food' and think they are going to get something frozen," she says. "They are very surprised."

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Tokyo Bowl's specialty is a bowl of rice topped with chicken or beef.

With 14 units operating in Denver, Tokyo Bowl is now planning expansion into other markets.

Gasho of Japan runs four units similar to Benihana's but more elaborate in decor.

Gasho units resemble an authentic 12th century Japanese farmhouse and gardens.

Japanese fast food

Japanese fast food is also becoming popular in the U.S. Denver-based Tokyo Bowl operates 14 units, all in Denver, with expansion plans calling for four new units this year. Almost all units are freestanding, but Tokyo Bowl will be testing a unit in an office building as well as a unit in a strip shopping center.

Tokyo Bowl Restaurant Inc.—in the process of going public—is a new company that took over a two-year-old company called Colevaal Inc., doing business as Tokyo Bowl. The new company closed several existing units, and now unit volume averages $285,000. Total volume in 1983 reached $2.4 million.

Tokyo Bowl's menu is based on six to seven ounces of rice served in a glass bowl and topped with beef, vegetables, or diced chicken, which accounts for 70 percent of sales. Tokyo Bowl also offers chicken teriyaki, beef teriyaki, sweet and sour pork, and ginger pork platters as well as a shrimp roll. The company is adding a noodle base as an alternative to the rice base, as well as brown rice, wild rice, and fried rice in addition to white rice. Prices range from 85 cents for shrimp roll to $3.99 for steak teriyaki.

In almost every city, individual Oriental fast food concepts with names like Rickshaw Express, Chinatown Express, and Tango are opening daily. "I think you'll see a big movement toward Oriental fast food in the next five to 10 years," says Bill Storm, a partner in Tokyo Bowl. "I think Oriental fast food will do what Mexican and pizza fast food did."

Benihana, the Japanese steakhouse chain, also is testing a fast food concept. Teriyaki USA evolved out of a Japanese noodle concept tested about a year ago in home base Miami, but noodles found only limited acceptance in that market. Teriyaki USA offers chicken, beef, and vegetable teriyaki; Japanese dumplings filled with shrimp, crab, or other items; and a teriyaki burger dipped in teriyaki sauce and served with onions.

Trying to combine Oriental sensibilities and techniques with Western methods is Shiczuki Hoffman, who opened Teriyaki of Japan 11 months ago in Tempe, Arizona. Hoffman moved to the U.S. from Japan with her American husband 28 years ago.

Located in a remodeled KFC unit, Teriyaki of Japan is an upscale fast food unit, with counter service and an open kitchen where each dish is prepared to order. Food is served in plastic bowls with chopsticks. Popular items include chicken and beef teriyaki, sukiyaki, tonkatsu (deep fried pork cutlets), and a teriyaki burger served with chips made out of thin cut, deep-fried rice cake. Prices range from $2 to $3.75.

Two Japanese-based chains have long had a small presence in the New York City market and are now expanding as Japanese food becomes popular. They are Dosanko, which serves a menu similar to Tokyo Bowl, with the base being noodles instead of rice; and Genroku Sushi, which serves a varied menu of raw and cooked fish.

Dosanko Foods Inc. operates 15 units in the metropolitan New York City area, with three more to open

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For information circle number 101 ➔

soon. "In three years, we want to have 50 units," says Dosanko vice president Mac Hidaka. "We will be expanding in the centers of cities including Washington and Philadelphia."

Dosanko serves only 12 items, with prices ranging from $2.85 to $5.50. Stores seat from 70 to 100 people, and 70 percent of sales comes from lunch. Chicken, fried noodles, and dumplings account for 75 percent of sales, with all other entrees making up 25 percent of sales.

The American Dosanko is a franchisee of a 1,200-unit Japanese company. Hidaka notes that chains are not uncommon in Japan, but the market is still open there and a businessman with $1 million to invest will invest it in Japan first. Japanese restaurants in the U.S.—and he says there are 200 in New York City alone—usually can't find the capital for aggressive expansion.

The other Japanese chain, Genroku Sushi, has had one store in Manhattan for 10 years but never expanded beyond that base despite the fact that the chain operates some 200 units in Japan. The reason, says the company's C.C. Kuo, is that 10 years ago the U.S. wasn't ready for sushi despite its high-protein, low-calorie content.

Sushi—very fresh raw fish—is a typical and traditional Japanese food. In larger metropolitan cities on the coast, where supply is not a problem, sushi bars have begun to develop a following among well-heeled, health-conscious, fashionable consumers, and Genroku has two more units under construction as a result. The company is also putting together a franchising program, and is testing a full-service restaurant serving sushi and other Japanese specialties. Called Sakura, the restaurant opened last June and is located in the affluent New York City suburb of Scarsdale.

Upscale Japanese

Many of the new young chefs who are causing such excitement on both coasts are Japanese who combine classical training with a deep love for their own native cuisine.

Combining French and Japanese techniques and ingredients isn't an entirely new phenomenon. As long ago as 1973, New York's La Maison Japonaise was serving a sophisticated mix of either Japanese or French foods. What is new is the melding of the two styles of cooking. At La Petite Chaya, for instance, even the name is mixture. "La Petite," of course, is French. "Chaya" is Japanese for "teahouse."

Classically trained chef Susumu Fukui heads a mostly Japanese staff in turning out such specialties as sashimi of beef with chaya sauce, which is thin peppered beef strips seared to a point just past rawness and served with a frothy dressing of egg whites whipped with mustard and herbs; a puff pastry "pot" filled with scrambled eggs, caviar, crabmeat, and uni (sea urchin roe used almost exclusively in Japanese sushi); and a hot artichoke salad stuffed with salad Russe, bedded on a pool of vinaigrette and garnished with whole crawfish heads stuffed with their own chopped tails. The menu changes every three months.

The Japanese say of themselves that they "eat with their eyes," and presentation is exquisite. The food is the entertainment; decor is sparse, almost austere.

Owner of La Petite Chaya is Yuji Tsunoda, whose family has run a traditional Japanese restaurant called Hikage Chaya near Tokyo for roughly 300 years. Tsunoda opened four restaurants in Japan himself, and plans to repeat the La Petite Chaya concept in various other cities, including New York.

Another Japanese entrepreneur with designs on the U.S. market is Kazuo Wakayama, who introduced East, a new Japanese country restaurant concept with two units in Manhattan. Wakayama also operates 24 restaurants in Japan and two in Singapore under the name of West. He has indicated that he will open yet another restaurant this year in Man-

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With its recent franchising agreement with Int'l Multifoods, Nankin Express is assured expansion beyond its Twin Cities base.

hattan, then look to the suburbs. Nationwide expansion is the goal.

East recreates the ambience of a Japanese country inn. Customers leave their shoes at the door, then are seated at low tables placed over hollows in the floor and surrounded by seat cushions covered with the typical Japanese dyed cloth called kasuri. Decor is very simple, in the Japanese manner, with burnished wood screens used as partitions.

Specialty of the menu is the traditional Japanese dish called horaku. The name actually refers to a round, lidded earthenware pot in which lobster, clams, beef, salmon, two kinds of mushrooms, and a selection of fresh vegetables are spread on a bed of smooth black pebbles, then gently steamed in an oven. The horaku is then served with a lemony dipping sauce containing "autumn-maple-leaf-snow" for a light aromatic tang.

The interest in authenticity shown by sophisticated California consumers is responsible for the success of a new concept called Goro's Robata in Mill Valley. Owner James Tasley plans to open more units in the near future.

Goro's Robata recalls a centuries-old country cooking technique of fishermen in the north of Japan. "Evenings in coastal villages will find fishermen cooking their catches over open fires in their boats, then sharing among themselves by passing food on oars from boat to boat," says Tasley.

At Goro's Robata, fresh fish likewise is grilled at an open fire tended by a chef dressed in colorful samurai garb. Customers sit either at tables or at a robata bar built around the display grill. Upon the robata bar are displayed fresh vegetables and fish for grilling, and customers make their own selection.

The menu consists mainly of small, appetizer-sized portions, and customers are encouraged to try a variety. One of the most popular appetizers is asparagus wrapped in thin beef, then sliced into bite-sized pieces. Also popular is tube calamari grilled and sliced, as well as barbequed quail, and chicken tatsute (bite-sized, marinated pieces of chicken fried crispy). Some of the more exotic specialites are zosui, a Japanese porridge of rice with shrimp and vegetables; eel liver; and jaws of hamachi yellowtail, prized by the Japanese for their sweet and tender meat. Prices for the appetizers range from $1.50 to $8 for seafood. Average check is about $13.

"People can be as adventuresome as they like," says Tasley. "The fact that portions are appetizer-sized encourages them to try a lot of different things."

The samurai-chef uses an oar to pass a completed order across the robata bar. Care is taken with garnishment. A piece of fish might be garnished with a little mound of ginger, a carrot cut in the shape of a leaf, and grated horseradish.

Upscale Chinese

Chinese cuisine is also growing increasingly fashionable. A Westerner stirred by the excitement of Chinese cuisine is chef Wolfgang Puck, owner of L.A.'s Spago and one of the gurus of the new "California cuisine." Puck's newest venture is the much-talked-about Chinois on Main, also in Los Angeles, which combines elements of Chinese, French, and California cuisines.

At Chinois on Main, first courses include egg drop sizzling duck soup with shitake mushrooms, tofu, and sesame oil; warm sweet curried oysters with cucumber sauce and salmon pearls; and stir-fried salad of scallops and sweet spinach leaves with five color vegetables. Entrees range from grilled Mongolian lamb with Japanese eggplant and tofu to pigeon and lobster on fried rice with three jewel sauce and stuffed chicken grilled with five willow sauce.

Chinois on Main's decor is a blend of bamboo, brick, Buddhas, and extravagant flower arrangements. Waiters wear black cotton Mao outfits. The spectacular setting features an open kitchen, but the main attraction is probably the well-heeled patrons themselves.

China Rose—a street market for eating and drinking—blends contemporary American atmosphere with Oriental foods. Located in Arlington, Texas, the restaurant's decor suggests a Bennigan's with its

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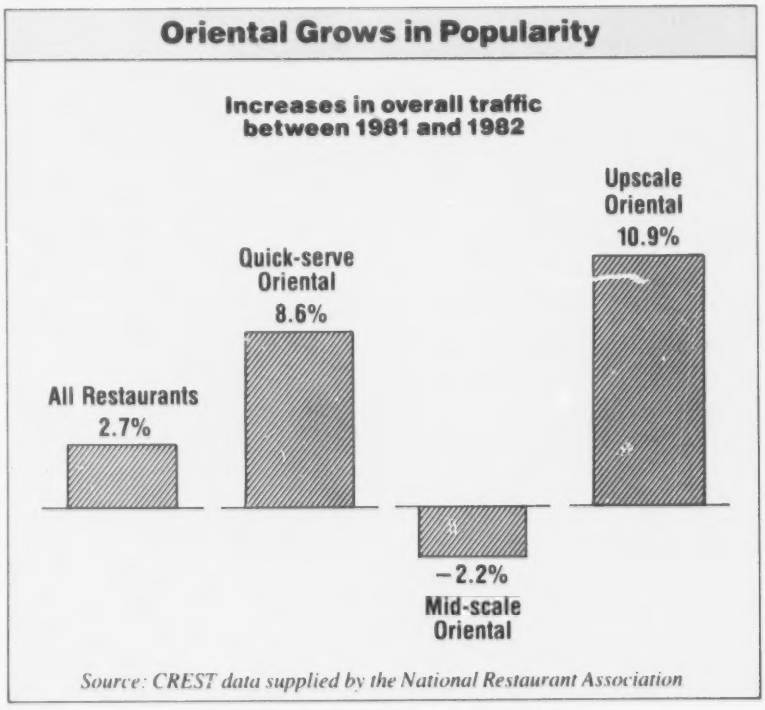

Colorful menu display board entices customers to one of 15 Dosanko units in NYC.

Seventy percent of Dosanko sales are generated during New York's lunchtime rush.

collection of posters (in English and in Chinese) banners, lanterns and signs. The Oriental Foods favors Hong Kong and selections range from the traditional egg rolls to Szechwan crispy fried duck.

Complimentary starters of Canton fried noodles and Hunan style sugar and chili peanuts are followed by appetizers such as parchment wrapped chicken and Hunan onion cakes.

A playful newsprint menu covers the restaurant's wide variety of items. Main categories (appetizers, soups, salads, poultry, meat and seafood) are divided into "mild and flavorful" or "hot and spicy" selections. House specialties include Dynasty-style Peking Duck, sweet and sour pork or fish.

An example of a traditional Chinese restauranteur who has made good is Wen-Dah Tai, who owns Uncle Tai's restaurants in both Houston and Dallas. Tai was hailed as one of New York's finest Chinese chefs when he worked at Uncle Tai's Hunan Yuan in Manhattan. Tai, his wife, and four sons moved to Houston in 1978, where he was an immediate success with his own restaurant and achieved some notoriety by introducing jalapeno peppers (similar to a native Chinese pepper) into Hunan cuisine.

Tai still speaks only a few words of English, and despite the glamour and fame of his two restaurants they typify many Oriental restaurants in the U.S. The four sons and their wives are all involved, and Uncle Tai himself spends up to 14 hours a day in the kitchen, where a three-panel screen with candles under it pays homage to the kitchen gods.

Japanese steakhouses

While some Americans are seeking exotic authenticity, Japanese "steak houses" like Benihana of Tokyo and Gasho of Japan continue to expand. Based on an authentic style of Japanese cooking called teppanyaki, or steel-grill cooking, both offer Westernized menus. A Benihana brochure about the Japanese land and people goes so far as to reassure customers that the restaurant serves no raw fish or "slimy questionables."

To please Westerners, the menus of both Benihana and Gasho lean heavily to shrimp, lobster, scallops, chicken, and steak with Japanese sauces, spices, and accompaniments.

Many restaurants from the East Coast to the West Coast have copied Benihana's successful formula of seating eight customers around a communal table whose center surface is a hibachi grill. Japanese chefs prepare meals right at the table with much entertaining flashing of knives and good humor.

Benihana's colorful owner is Rocky Aoki, who has been quoted as saying "In order to have successful life, you have to forget you are Japanese. You got to have American mentality. Things move much faster here than in Japan."

An Olympic wrestler, Aoki saved $10,000 to help open his first four-

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table restaurant by peddling ice cream in Harlem. He slept in the new restaurant's bathroom until the first unit caught on, and today there are 47 units nationwide. Aoki is famous for his exploits in race cars and speed boats, but everything he does seems designed to attract attention to Benihana. Recently, the chain launched a line of frozen Oriental entrees sold in supermarkets nationwide.

Gasho of Japan, with four units (two in the New York City metro area and two in Denver) and another to open soon on Long Island, is similar to Benihana and is owned by Rocky Aoki's brother, Shiro, (though the two companies are not related).

Gasho and Benihana serve similar menus, but Gasho restaurants themselves are much more elaborate. The first, built in Central Valley, New York, is a disassembled 12th-century "gasho" farmhouse from the rugged hills of Japan's Hide province. The farmhouse was painstakingly reconstructed along with elaborate ceremonial and meditation gardens. The Japanese government has declared such farmhouses a national treasure, so future Gashos will be authentic reproductions.

Shiro Aoki has said that part of his aim is to introduce Japanese culture to Americans, and his newest unit on Long Island, built at a cost of $2.9 million, is designed as a center to promote American understanding of Japanese culture, art, and learning.

Aoki has announced plans for further expansion, possibly into 35 new markets. Next locations may be Florida and New York City, where Aoki wants to build a complete Japanese farmhouse inside an old brownstone. That unit would also include a sushi bar serving raw fish.

Because of its Westernized menu, Gasho has found a Sunday brunch very successful. The restaurants also offers such light Western desserts as plum wine mousse and Rainbow's End, a gelatin base with fresh fruit juices and fresh fruit, topped with whipped cream.

Mid-price Oriental

Chinese restaurateurs in the U.S. have been less expansion-minded than Japanese restaurateurs. One Japanese observer says that the Chinese are more tied to traditional ways of thinking and are less eager to learn to plumb the American psyche, which is essential in order to market to Americans on a large scale.

New York's East restaurant recreates the ambience of a Japanese country inn.

Norm Dyer's Phoenix Oriental Cuisine in North Lake, Illinois, is interesting because Dyer is a Westerner involved in an authentic Chinese restaurant run by a Chinese family, rather than a Westerner who became infatuated with Chinese food or sensed profit potential. Since he and his Chinese wife took over, revenues have grown 50 percent a year for the last three years.

"The Chinese properly say that what Chinese restaurateurs lack most is any conception of American marketing and professional management," says Dyer. "Our unit is a grand experiment in merging Western business philosophy with the strong family philosophy of most Oriental restaurants. We are taking a hard look at what American management and marketing have to offer. We're structuring the restaurant like a corporation and defining job roles."

Price range for a menu that includes Thai and Japanese specialties as well as Chinese is from $3 to $13 for everything from egg rolls to lobster and crab.

The restaurant started life as a mid-priced sit-down restaurant, but delivery now accounts for over 50 percent of Phoenix Oriental Cuisine's business. "We're an alternative to pizza," Dyer says. "We deliver to two zones, within a 10-minute radius (at a cost of $1) and within a 20-minute radius (at a cost of $2). We keep three drivers busy, and what we've learned from experience, our next four units will cater and deliver only."

Those four units, all in the Chicago area, will be located in the middle of large industrial parks. Through a zoning loophole, Phoneix Oriental Cuisine is going into the parks as a food processor. The parks normally keep restaurants out, Dyer says.

Dyer takes Oriental cuisine seriously, and his wife takes periodic trips to the Far East to study under prominent chefs. "It's seldom realized that you're getting gourmet cooking when you eat Chinese food, when it may take only 45 seconds to prepare the order," he points out.

Coming July 20: Barbecue segment